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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003901

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/16/2016

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SUBJECT: IRAQI LEADERS DEBATE EXTENSION OF UNSCR MANDATE ON
MNF-I

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Daniel V. Speckhard for reasons 1.4 (b)
) and (d).

11. (S) SUMMARY: In separate meetings on October 16, President Talabani and Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih informed the Ambassador that the second session of the extended Policy Committee on National Security (PCNS) meeting focused almost exclusively on the question of whether to extend the UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) on the presence of Multi-National Forces in Iraq (MNF-I). While Salih and Talabani gave different perspectives on the tenor of the meeting - with Talabani being more upbeat in his report - in the end both agreed that the Iraqi leaders had understood the necessity of maintaining the MNF-I presence in Iraq. The Ambassador thanked both Talabani and Salih for their support, and emphasized the need to resolve the UNSCR extension issue by the end of October. Toward this end, he suggested that reopening the Resolution for debate would be counterproductive, with which both immediately agreed. It was important, however, not to dismiss the concerns of the Iraqis. The Ambassador and Talabani then agreed that sending a separate, formal, letter to the UN - in addition to extending the UNSCR - would be the best option. For now, both Talabani and Salih noted that there was no need for the Council of Representatives (CoR) to be involved. Post will continue to press for a timely resolution to this issue. END SUMMARY.

Two Different Perspectives: Salih Concerned

12. (S) In separate meetings on October 16, President Talabani and Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih informed the Ambassador that the second session of the extended Policy Committee on National Security (PCNS) meeting focused almost exclusively on the question of whether to extend the UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) on the presence of Multi-National Forces in Iraq (MNF-I). (Note: Iraqi officials told the Embassy in septel the decision by the PCNS to hold an extended "open session" until all outstanding security and political issues are resolved. END NOTE). According to Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih, the discussion on the UNSCR extension was marred by negative statements by Sunni Arab officials and some Shia party leaders. Salih reported that Sunni Arab Vice President Tarik al-Hashimi had initially resisted extending the mandate, citing concerns over Iraqi sovereignty. Sunni Arab Deputy Prime Minister Salam al-Zawbai also expressed his concerns over the increased violence in the streets linked to the presence of MNF-I forces, and stated forcefully that the Council of Representatives (CoR) would not agree to the extension. Predictably, the Sadrists insisted that the Iraqis should reject the extension, and even the Prime

Minister's position had shifted significantly, Salih noted, from requesting additional bases to wanting to limit the authority of the Coalition Forces.

¶3. (S) Salih did praise the statement of Shia Vice President Adil Abd al-Mahdi, stating that his calm and measured approach did much to soothe the tensions and move the PCNS members toward a plan to extend the UNSCR mandate, as well as pursue a separate bilateral agreement with language incorporating more of the Iraqi concerns. His argument that opening the UNSCR to debate by other international players would be counterproductive to Iraq's interest was well received. Iraqiyya's Ayad Jamal al-Din also played a good role, he said, chiding some leaders for seeking to use Coalition soldiers as though they were "mercenaries." In the end, the Shia parties understood the need for MNF-I's continued presence, and even al-Hashimi admitted he only fully trusted the Coalition Forces, Salih said.

(While Talabani Reassures

¶4. (S) In a more upbeat assessment, President Talabani claimed that everyone - including the Sadrists and al-Hashimi - had expressed his support for the extension of the UNSCR mandate. Talabani also praised Abd al-Mahdi's leadership, and reported that he had specifically asked the PCNS members if any objected to extending the UNSCR mandate, and that no one had spoken. In response to the Ambassador's statement repeating Salih's more negative report of the meeting, Talabani brushed aside the "minor disagreements" and noted that in the end all the parties had recognized the need for the Coalition's continued presence in Iraq.

Assessing the Various Options

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¶5. (C) The Ambassador thanked both Talabani and Salih for their support, and emphasized the need to resolve the UNSCR extension issue by the end of October. Toward this end, he suggested that reopening the Resolution for debate would be counterproductive, with which both Kurdish leaders immediately agreed. It was important, however, not to dismiss the concerns of the Iraqis. The Ambassador and Talabani then considered the following options:

-- Joint US-Iraqi statement: This statement would take into consideration the papers presented by the Iraqis with their demands, including reconsidering immunity and increasing Iraqi sovereignty.

-- Letters to UN: Incorporating Iraqi concerns into the U.S. and Iraqi letters to the Security Council requesting the extension. Talabani noted that the PCNS agreed that the Government would now be charged with moving the negotiations forward with the US.

-- US-Iraqi Exchange: In addition to the formal letters requesting extension sent to the UNSC, the Governments of the U.S. and Iraq could exchange formal correspondence addressing the Iraqi concerns, or reaching an agreement or "protocol".

-- Iraqi Letter to UN: In addition to requesting the extension, Talabani would send a formal letter to the UN, with the US's support, laying out Iraqi concerns.

After a brief discussion, Talabani determined that the last option - sending a separate, formal, letter to the UN - was the best way to ensure the timely extension of the mandate while continuing to express Iraqi concerns and demands.

Role for the CoR ?

¶6. (C) According to Salih, CoR Speaker Mahmud al-Mashadani had insisted during the PCNS meeting that the CoR needed to have the final word on the UNSCR extension, but Talabani, Salih, and others all agreed that there was no need for parliamentary approval if it was to a straightforward extension of the mandate. Talabani noted that Maliki had explicitly stated during the PCNS meeting that all the political leaders who had agreed to the extension of the UNSCR that evening must uphold their support - and ensure their various political blocs followed their example - if a vote was called for in the CoR. Responding to the Ambassador's query, Talabani stated that only Maliki could decide whether the issue would even come to the CoR for a vote.

SPECKHARD